



for Child Care,
Early Education
and Afterschool Programs

PROGRAM GUIDE 2007

STARS is a quality initiative of the Child Development Division of the Department for Children and Families of the Agency of Human Services, 103 S. Main Street, Waterbury, VT 05671. It is administered under contract with Learning Partners, Inc., at 214 Elm Street, Barre, Vermont 05641. Questions or comments about this system can be directed to the Child Development Division at 1 (800) 649-2642, Learning Partners, Inc. at (802) 479-5261, or *learningpartnrs@aol.com* or through the STARS website at *www.STARSstepahead.org*.

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Vermont Department of Education	Vermont Head Start Collaboration Office
Vermont School Age Care Network (VSACN)	Vermont Out Of School Time
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History

STARS, Vermont's graduated system of child care recognition, was initiated by the Child Development Division (CDD) of the Department for Children and Families to improve the quality of child care and education in Vermont by recognizing the efforts of programs that go above and beyond the regulatory standards. It was first made available to programs in 2003 and formally launched in 2004.

The system was developed with community input collected through a series of focus groups and forums in 2001 and 2002. Providers in licensed and registered child care, early education and school age programs, community child care support agency staff members such as directors, resource development specialists, child care subsidy specialists and child care referral specialists, Head Start/Early Head Start personnel, Child and Adult Care Food Program personnel, members of Success by Six, children's mental health practitioners, parents and others provided input and feedback into the design of this system.

Many other states have implemented graduated systems to recognize the efforts of child care programs that operate above the standards of basic regulations. The Child Development Division contracted with an independent consulting firm to take the strengths of other states' systems and combine them with the voices from Vermont to create the graduated system described in this document. The consulting firm, Learning Partners, Inc. of Barre, VT serves as the contracted administrator for STARS, providing technical assistance and processing applications.

Overview

STARS allows registered and licensed child care and education programs to demonstrate the accomplishment of clearly defined professional and program goals and obtain recognition based on these achievements. This system is designed to improve the quality of care in Vermont by recognizing the efforts of programs that go beyond the CDD regulatory standards. It also supports program improvement through clear steps for setting and achieving future goals. STARS enables programs to communicate their strengths and helps parents to choose programs that have the strengths that meet their needs. Participation in STARS is not required for licensing or registration with the Child Development Division; however there are some financial benefits available only to STARS participants. Programs participating in STARS must be in compliance with Vermont's regulations for registered or licensed child care, early education or school age programs.

STARS is based on five “arenas of action”:

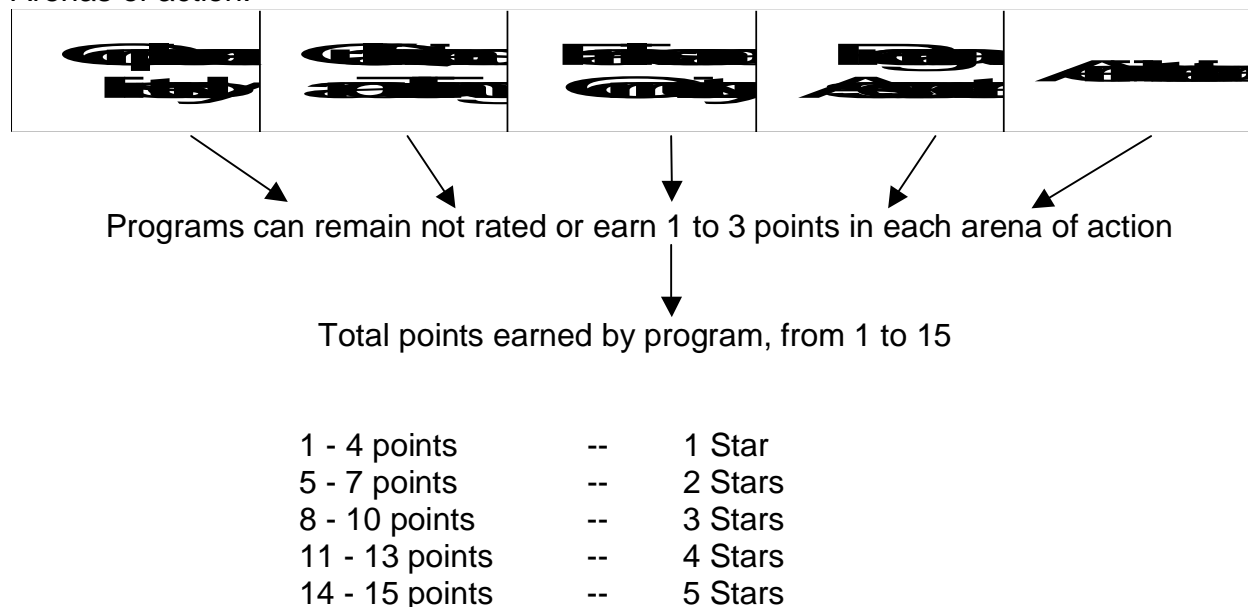
1. Compliance History
2. Qualifications and Training
3. Families and Community
4. Program Assessment
5. Administration

Except for the Administration arena, the arenas of action are the same for licensed and registered programs. In each arena 1, 2 or 3 points can be earned for activities or achievements beyond what is required by Child Development Division's regulations.

Applicants (licensed center director, family child care registrant, program owner, supervisor or other designated person) determine the number of points they are able to obtain in each arena of action, based on the program practices and achievements they are able to verify with supporting documentation. In any arena, programs can indicate that they are operating at the level of regulatory compliance and are not earning points in that arena at this time.

Points are totaled across all five arenas so that programs can achieve from 1 - 15 points. The number of points obtained determines how many stars the program has earned. The different levels show a widening range of the characteristics in effective programs.

Arenas of action:



Participating programs receive a certificate indicating the number of stars attained and a profile illustrating the number of points earned in each arena. An incentives system to reward STARS programs is discussed in greater detail on page 6.

Application process

Any program that is licensed or registered with the CDD is eligible to participate. The program determines how many points it can obtain in each area and submits an application with the required verifications as described in the application information. Applications can be obtained through the website (www.STARSstepahead.org) or from the contracted administrator, Learning Partners, Inc. (learningpartnrs@aol.com or 802-479-5261). Completed applications are sent to Learning Partners. Programs with multiple sites submit applications for each site that holds a separate license number.

Programs are awarded the points requested in each arena, given that the verification materials are complete. If the request for points is not substantiated by the verification materials, the application will be returned to the program without awarding a certificate. The application can be resubmitted at any time. Reviewers will not assign points other than what is requested on the application; rather they will return the materials for additional work. A review board exists for situations where consultation is needed.

The CDD is informed when the program's application is complete and this information is used to recognize and reward participating programs. It is up to a program to inform parents, local child care support agencies and others at their own discretion. The Child Development Division provides communication materials to programs for this purpose.

Accredited and other qualifying programs

Programs accredited under the 2006 NAEYC standards and Head Start/Early Head Start sites whose grantee has achieved a Blue or Gold Certificate, and who have been in operation for 5 or more years with no regulatory compliance issues, and who are Specialized Child Care Providers receive 5 STARS upon submitting a brief application.

Programs accredited through NAFCC, NAA or NECPA automatically qualify for specific point levels in certain arenas. NAEYC accredited programs that do not meet the above requirements also qualify for these automatic points. These programs earn 2 points in the Qualifications and Training arena and the Administration arena and 1 point in the Families and Community arena. These programs do not need to submit documentation other than accrediting or validation materials or reports if there are no areas in need of improvement indicated in these validation materials. There is a streamlined application process for these programs.

Operation and renewal process

The certificate and star level rating is valid for one year, starting with the first day of the month after the complete application is processed. If the program closes (the license or registration is closed or terminated), the certificate becomes invalid. If the program reopens (a new CDD program number assigned), a new application must be submitted.

The program's STARS level does not change during the year unless it is found that the program submitted a falsified application. These situations will result in the immediate removal of the program's rating. Programs falsifying information will be held accountable for fraud.

If a program is unable to maintain the standards of its current star level (e.g., a staffing change occurs), no action is taken until the program submits its annual renewal. The program would request points based on the standards it can demonstrate at renewal.

Participating programs renew their certificate for the number of points they can verify (may be higher, same or lower than previously earned points). Programs renew by submitting a renewal application package (automatically sent to participating programs).

Grievance process

Applicants or program participants have the right to appeal, to the Human Services Board, the rejection of their application material or other adverse decision related to the STARS program, such as the suspension or revocation of a STARS certificate in connection with enforcement of licensing regulations, subsidy regulations, or these standards.

Appeals must be in writing and received by the Department for Children and Families or its designee within 30 days of the date of the rejection or other adverse decision.

Prior to a Fair Hearing, the applicant or grievant shall have the opportunity to present the appeal to a STARS grievance committee. The committee shall be appointed by the Commissioner of the Department for Children and Families and consists of at least three members, including one from the regulated provider community, and provide the Commissioner with a recommendation. The Commissioner shall make a final decision on the grievance and provide the grievant with a written decision prior to a Fair Hearing, which the Human Services Board will conduct according to its rules.

Public awareness, recognition and incentives

An outreach and education campaign exists to inform parents and the general public about STARS and its levels. Efforts seek to inform parents about how to use the graduated recognition system as they look for appropriate child care to meet their needs. Service agencies supporting parents and child care programs will be able to use the structure of the graduated system to refine their services.

An incentives system has been developed to reward STARS programs for their achievements. In addition to the recognition the program will receive for its accomplishments, the Child Development Division will award a financial bonus to programs based on the number of stars earned. The incentives system also encompasses a variety of rewards ranging from local recognition and community based rewards to increased subsidy rates and preference to receive facility and other grants. A full schedule of current incentives can be found at www.STARSstepahead.org.

Arenas of Action and Point Standards

Arena I. Compliance History

Programs should have few to no substantiated violations of the applicable CDD regulations for child care and education programs and should make every effort to know and adhere to regulations. Prior corrected violations do not exclude a program from participating, though they will limit the number of points that can be achieved. Programs participating in STARS cannot have outstanding, uncorrected violations of any kind. The length of time the program has been in operation is determined by the opening date of the current license or registration number.

Points	Standards	Indicators
	The program is currently in compliance with all applicable regulations and any previous, substantiated violations have been corrected as required to the satisfaction of the Child Development Division. Programs that have not been in operation for more than one year at the time of application cannot earn points in this arena. A licensing specialist has visited and assessed the program in the past 2 years.	verification from Licensing
1	The program is in compliance as defined above, has had no substantiated violations resulting in a Parental Notification and no general pattern of regulatory noncompliance within the past year. A licensing specialist has visited and assessed the program in the past 2 years.	verification from Licensing
2	The program is in compliance as defined above, has had no substantiated violations resulting in a Parental Notification and no general pattern of regulatory noncompliance within the past 3 years. A licensing specialist has visited and assessed the program in the past 2 years.	verification from Licensing
3	The program is in compliance as defined above, has had no substantiated violations resulting in a Parental Notification and no general pattern of regulatory noncompliance within the past 5 years. A licensing specialist has visited and assessed the program in the past 2 years.	verification from Licensing

Arena II. Qualifications and Training

In addition to the qualifications and professional development hours required by CDD regulations, the people working with children are experienced, well-trained and committed to ongoing professional development.

Points	Standards	Indicators
	All staff hold qualifications as required by applicable regulations. Any deficiencies have been remedied and any required corrective action has been completed.	the program is operating according to and in compliance with regulations
1	In addition to qualifications defined in state regulations, at least 50% of staff members who have been employed in the program at least six months and are or could be alone with children (1) prepare an annual training plan (e.g. an IPDP) and (2) complete 12 hours of professional growth activities per year above regulatory minimum, distributed across core knowledge areas as designated in the training plan. Staff members may or may not hold certifications or college degrees.	annual professional development plan with areas for growth indicated, confirmation of hours through professional development form, transcripts, certificate or other documentation
2	At least 50% of staff members who have been employed in the program at least six months and are or could be alone with children have (1) at least CDA, 15 college credits, Associates degree or higher (BA, MA, PhD) in a relevant field, certificate of completion from the Registered Child Care Apprenticeship Program or other nationally recognized child care credential, (2) professional development plan prepared annually, (3) 24 hours of professional growth activities per year above regulatory minimum, distributed across core knowledge areas as per the training plan and (4) at least two years experience in an early childhood or after school setting.	confirmation of degree or certification, confirmation of hours through professional development form, transcripts, certificate or other documentation, annual professional development plan with areas for growth indicated, work history for the last two years. Relevant fields for degrees include Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Developmental Psychology, Child Development or other fields with coursework relevant to children's growth and learning or relevant for a specific staff position.
3	At least 50% of staff members who have been employed in the program at least six months and are or could be alone with children have (1) a minimum of a BA, BS, MA, Ph.D. or 30 college credits in a relevant field, (2) professional development plan prepared annually, (3) 36 hours of professional growth activities per year above regulatory minimum, distributed across core knowledge areas as per the training plan and (4) at least five years experience in an early childhood or after school setting.	confirmation of degree, confirmation of hours through professional development form, transcripts, certificate or other documentation, annual professional development plan with areas for growth indicated, work history for the last five years. Relevant fields are as listed above.

Arena III. Families and Community

The philosophy of the child care program is to establish professional connections to support children and families within the local community. The program actively accepts its role as a member of a professional community and is willing to take a leadership role as appropriate.

Points	Standards	Indicators
	The program meets regulations related to parent handbooks, policies and communications with parents as required by applicable regulations. Any deficiencies have been remedied and any required corrective action has been completed.	the program is operating according to and in compliance with regulations
1	The program collects annual parent satisfaction survey and actively makes resources available to parents. Program participates in professional networking at least four times a year. Program has a written philosophy about the relationship between the parents and the program.	submit a summary of parent satisfaction survey, list attendance dates of networking activities – conferences, workshops, provider group meetings, etc. (any member of the program may attend), describe parent resource system, submit written philosophy
2	The program adheres to all standards for one point (above) plus routinely participates in community teams at least 24 hours per year. Opportunities are available for parent involvement in the program that embody the written philosophy of parent-program relationship. The program is prepared to serve children with special needs including protective services (that is, is a Specialized Child Care Services site).	list attendance dates and describe activities to verify participation in a community team as a child care professional (teams include service or staffing teams for families -- e.g., IFSP, IEP, case plan, Head Start --, Success by Six, Early Childhood Council, CCSSA advisory board), describe parent involvement opportunities and how they relate to program philosophy, describe how children with special needs are served, describe parent resource system
3	The program adheres to all standards for two points (above) plus plays a leadership role in the early childhood or after school professional community	list leadership activities and dates where applicable, describe how leadership activities have impacted the professional community

Arena IV. Program Assessment

In the Program Assessment arena, programs assess their environment and practices and have an ongoing plan for improvement and change based on the assessment. Program assessment involves comparing the program's practices to known standards, such as state regulations, developmentally appropriate practices or practices of accredited programs, and creating a program improvement plan to move the program toward stronger practices.

Points	Standards	Indicators
not rated	The program operates as required by applicable regulations related to curriculum, developmentally appropriate activities, child guidance, child-adult interactions and care giving. Any deficiencies have been remedied and any required corrective action has been completed.	the program is operating according to and in compliance with regulations
1	The program is evaluated using a self-assessment tool and has a written improvement plan based upon findings of self-assessment. Staff members provide input for and receive feedback in the assessment.	submit a program improvement plan, appropriate self-assessment tools must include content that addresses at least: 1) interactions between adults and children, 2) developmentally appropriate program, activities or curriculum, 3) health and safety standards, including indoor and outdoor spaces, 4) relationships and communication with families, and 5) administration, policies, business practices or personnel.
2	The program meets the standards of 1 point (above). The program determines through self-assessment that it has obtained the appropriate minimum score, and has an improvement plan based on this assessment. A CDD-approved STARS Assessor has verified the assessment. Staff members provide input for and receive feedback in the assessment.	submit Assessment Verification Form (provided by assessor) and program improvement plan based on the assessment and prior goals. Programs must obtain a specified score on the assessment to obtain 2 points in this arena. (See document "How to earn 2 points" for more information on assessments and minimum scores.)
3	The program holds a current accreditation and has a written improvement plan based upon findings of an annual self-assessment	verification of accreditation status through NAEYC, NAFCC, NAA or NECPA, program improvement plan or annual report to accrediting body

Arena V (a). Administration for registered child care

(Licensed programs use Arena V (b).)

Registered child care programs demonstrate a strong foundation for their home business. This includes designing and implementing clear operating policies, using sound business practices and recognizing their role as a professional.

Points	Standards	Indicators
	The program meets all applicable regulations related to business practices, policies, required certifications, permits, application and reapplication materials. Any deficiencies have been remedied and any required corrective action has been completed.	the program is operating according to and in compliance with regulations
1	The program has a contract or other written agreement with parent signature, written policies for 1) exclusions due to child illness, 2) payment for services and 3) daily routine for children	submit written policies
2	The program adheres to all standards for one point (above) plus has defined vacation, sick, holiday and professional day closings, with at least two categories being supported through parent fees. At least one person in the program holds a membership in at least one professional organization	submit written policies, list organization(s) where membership is held (national, state or local)
3	The program adheres to all standards for two points (above) plus a parent handbook written specifically for this program that includes program and guidance philosophy. The program operates a financially sound business that conforms to federal standards for a small business including fees derived from a budget. The program carries liability insurance.	submit copy of handbook, submit documentation of liability insurance, submit operations budget for the program that has been independently verified (verification can be from an accountant, advisor, instructor, or other independent source)

Arena V (b). Administration for licensed program

(includes early childhood programs, school age child care, licensed family child care and non-recurring care. Registered programs use Arena V (a).)

Licensed child care programs demonstrate a strong foundation for maintaining an experienced, well-trained and professional staff. This includes clear policies about fair labor practices, a structure to support appropriate professional growth and a commitment to fair compensation.

Points	Standards	Indicators
	The program meets all applicable regulations related to business practices, policies, required certifications, permits, application and reapplication materials. Any deficiencies have been remedied and any required corrective action has been completed.	the program is operating according to and in compliance with regulations
1	All staff employed 6 months or longer and who are or could be left alone with children have an Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP) and opportunities for professional growth. These staff have regular opportunities to refine their skills through a system of feedback and guidance. The program has an employee handbook detailing policies for at least hiring and firing, advancement, grievance, sexual harassment, benefits and child abuse reporting.	describe professional development activities and how they relate to staff professional development plans, describe how professional development and growth is supported in the program (could include paid release time, stipends, in-house training and other supports), submit copy of employee handbook
2	The program adheres to all standards for one point (above) plus staff (1) are provided with breaks within their scheduled work day, (2) have paid planning time of at least one hour per week without children, (3) have a benefits package including, at minimum, two of the following: paid vacation, sick, personal or professional days, and (4) have input in program policies.	include indicators from above, describe how these standards are met
3	The program adheres to all standards for two points (above) plus has a salary scale that recognizes professional achievement. The median adjusted pay for all employees is at least \$11.30 per hour. This is 85% of Vermont's livable wage for a single person (\$13.30 per hour) without employer paid health benefits.	include indicators from above, submit salary scale, submit worksheet to calculate adjusted wage level (which includes pay, health care and dependent care)